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## FBI DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER WRAY OFFERS ADVICE TO STUDENTS:

**"LISTEN. ASK QUESTIONS. CONSIDER MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW."**by [Kelley McGee](#) | March 1, 2023*Read time: about 3 min*

Christopher Newport students had the unique opportunity to meet with FBI Director Christopher Wray. Wray was on campus as a keynote speaker at the Homeland Security Symposium & Expo, co-hosted by Christopher Newport University's [Center for American Studies](#) and Huntington Ingalls Industries. Immediately following his speech, Wray met privately with students, offering his candid thoughts on a wide range of topics from career advice to why he doesn't trust apps like TikTok.

"At the risk of making myself very unpopular, I've been fairly vocal about TikTok. Part of the reason is because of who owns the app – the Chinese. It's not that I'm particularly worried about whether they're monitoring kids posting cat videos, but the reality is there's lots of information being offered up on the app and it's all easily accessible to the Chinese government," Wray said. "I don't mean to pick exclusively on TikTok, but the app is just one example of a type of communication technology that's being used in all sorts of things in our daily life, from refrigerators to HVAC systems. These things all become risks in ways we might not normally expect."

In addition to potentially using technology to spy, Wray told students that the Chinese government has occasionally been successful at intimidating college students on American soil.

"At a Midwest university, a U.S. student attending a U.S. university posted on social media something honoring the protestors killed in Tiananmen Square. The Chinese government found out, went to his parent's house in China, and basically started threatening them because of what their son was posting in the United States. A protest was

planned at his university, but once again, the Chinese government found out, went back to his parent's house and dialed up the threat. The kid decided it was better to be quiet and not speak up. This kid was expressing his free speech on campus in the United States in the middle of the heartland, and he was threatened and intimidated by the Chinese government. It's bad enough when it happens in China, worse when it happens here."

Students had the opportunity to ask Wray a variety of questions. Megan Berotti '25 inquired about what the FBI is doing to combat disinformation.

"Disinformation is definitely a challenge. The FBI has a role to play, but we don't patrol the internet and point out what's false. But what we do in the FBI is investigate foreign adversaries who are engaged in disinformation in our country. For example, if the Russian government is posing as an American pollster, and says something online, and we find out that it's actually Russian intelligence or one of their troll farms, then we would try to go after that. But we really can't be in the business of content, so we aren't."

Wray added that social media companies and the public need to do their part. "Everyone, including all of you, have a responsibility as an engaged voting member of the public to get your news from multiple sources. Ask yourself – 'does this make sense? Is there another point of view?' What makes disinformation possible is when people just believe everything they read and don't question it. A media literate public is the best defense against disinformation. I'm hopeful, and I've noticed that people of your generation have never known life without the internet, and are actually more discerning. We're from the generation where if it was printed, it must be somewhat reliable. You guys know there's all kinds of junk out there. So, I'm hopeful that your generation will find ways to combat this."

The Homeland Security Symposium & Expo also featured Aliscia Andrews, Virginia's Deputy Secretary Homeland Security and Rear Admiral Douglas Verissimo, Director of Maritime Operations for the U.S. Fleet Command, who along with Wray, examined ways to protect America's critical infrastructure.

"We are delighted that FBI Director Wray was able to join us at the Center for American Studies' Homeland Security Symposium, and we are especially grateful that he was able to meet with Christopher Newport students in a closed-door Q&A session after his keynote address," said Distinguished Professor of [Political Science Nathan Busch](#), Co-Director of the Center for American Studies. "This was a rare opportunity for our students, and one that few students at any university in the country have had the chance to experience."

When a student asked Director Wray what keeps him up at night, he joked: "If you were to ask my wife this, she would laugh and say I can barely stay awake at the dinner table. But in all seriousness, I do get asked this question quite a bit. I would say what keeps me up at night is our ability to access the information we need to do our job."

Wray concluded by offering some advice to students.

"My kids are about the same age as all of you, and I often advise them to always try to be a good listener. Somebody smart once said, 'as long as you're talking, you're not learning'. So get in the habit of asking questions and absorbing information," Wray said. "And never forget that character matters. When the FBI recruits, we recruit from all stripes—not one major in particular. But the one thing that is non-negotiable for us is character. You know the saying 'character is how you behave when no one is watching.' Live your life in a way that's faithful to that."